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SUBJECT: VIEWS ON THE DARFUR PEACE AGREEMENT FROM THE
GROUND: MUKJAR AND GARSILA, WEST DARFUR

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Summary

¶1. From July 8 to 13, a USAID/Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) Field Advisor and a USAID Program Assistant traveled to Mukjar and Garsila towns in West Darfur to speak to displaced communities about the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) and the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC). A subsequent cable will address quick-impact programming possibilities in these areas.

¶2. Fur internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Mukjar and Garsila area are still very negative toward the DPA. Their primary grievances are that uniformed Arab militias have not been disarmed, the compensation is not enough for the Fur who lost more in the conflict than the Zaghawa, and Abdel Wahid al Nur did not sign the document. Fur IDPs claim that the distribution of the DPA is a waste of time, and they will not read it until Al Nur signs it.

¶3. There are concrete actions that can be done immediately to support the DPA in this area. The African Union (AU) needs to improve public relations with IDPs and inhabitants in the Mukjar/Garsila area. Also, the U.N. can use its reputation as being an unbiased actor to facilitate discussions and workshops with the AU. End summary.

Situation in Mukjar and Garsila

¶4. Both Mukjar and Garsila are primarily Fur. Mukjar town is the government seat of Mukjar locality, which is home to 16,000 to 18,000 people, according to international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Prior to the conflict, the population of Mukjar was between 4,000 and 8,000 people. The Mukjar area was the scene of some of the most brutal fighting in August 2003, the villages around Mukjar were burned, residents fled into Mukjar (and a minority to Nyala and Khartoum),

and mass executions reportedly took place. The majority of the current population are those who fled the burning of villages in the rural countryside.

15. Garsila town is home to approximately 40,000 IDPs in three different camps along the villages' outskirts. The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that prior to the conflict there were 6,000 households of primarily African tribes, with some Arab households. Most IDPs in Garsila came from a cluster of approximately 30 villages near Garsila that were completely destroyed and are now visibly occupied by nomad civilians and Arab militia.

View from Women and Youth

16. During this trip, the USAID team discussed the humanitarian situation and early recovery needs. In Mukjar, six Fur women leaders referred to as Qsheikas described how the lack of security and food influenced their views of the DPA. They angrily stated that the U.N. Food Program (WFP) reduced their rations in April. (Note: WFP rations were reduced to half due to pipeline problems, but full rations will resume soon. End note.) They also stated that Arab militias had not been disarmed, and they are unable to farm due to the occupation of lands by nomads. They QlostQ on the compensation issue in the agreement, and that they do not trust Minni Minawi to give them even the limited provisions that are in the DPA. For these reasons they were against the DPA. The women repeated, QWe need food or a force, not the DPA.

17. Also in Mukjar, after the signing of the DPA, the IDP residents, particularly young men made a written

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record of their grievances. This was formally presented to the AU in Mukjar on May 26, and shared with the USAID team. The main points were the following: 1) protection of IDPs by U.N. forces; 2) disarmament of the uniformed Arab militia; 3) immediate delivery of war criminals to the International Criminal Court; 4) individual compensation to IDPs and refugees; 5) rebuilding destroyed villages; and 6) separation of humanitarian issues from political demands. In Garsila, the USAID team also met with a school master who explained that immediately after the DPA was signed, he observed that many of his students and other youth in the IDP camps left to join the SLA/Abdel Wahid (AW) to demonstrate their rejection of the agreement.

Views on DPA and DDDC from SheiksQ and Local Elites

18. The USAID team met with four of the five most senior sheiks from the displaced community residing in Mukjar. They were against the DPA because they lost everything, compensation is not enough, and Abdel Wahid al Nur did not sign the agreement. The sheiks did not want copies of the DPA for themselves and claimed they would not read the DPA until Abdel Wahid signs it. Additionally, they were distrustful of the Sudanese government. According to the sheiks, the area is Qfull of arms, and they doubted the Sudanese governmentQs ability to change the situation. As they explained, Qthe government hasnQt finished the war and they are supporting the Chadian opposition right in Mukjar. Thus they cannot be serious about disarming anyone. According to the group, several weeks earlier Arab militia had come into Mukjar to meet with the Sudanese government. The Sudanese government issued them new uniforms and openly stated that the Arab militia were to

prepare themselves for U.N. troops.

¶9. When asked if they heard of any plans for the DDDC, the sheiks stated that it was Qbig joke.Q The government in Mukjar recently requested that the sheiks travel to El Geneina for the first meeting of the DDDC; however, they refused to go because the Sudanese government offered them money and told them what to say at the meeting. In Garsila, the team met with local educated elites who were frustrated with the general security situation and did not have high hopes for the DDDC, saying that it will probably be manipulated by the Sudanese government. (Note: The USAID team attempted to meet with the sheik leadership of the three Garsila camps, but the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) stated that they must facilitate such a meeting, so the USAID team refused. End note.)

The AU in Mukjar

¶10. The IDP community views the AU as being co-opted by and under the direction of the Sudanese government, and the AU does little to dissuade this perception. When the AU first arrived in Mukjar in June 2005, the community presented a list of persons reportedly executed and buried in a mass grave near to the location where the AU was building its base. The community claimed that the AU did nothing, even at a minimum to secure the location or even investigate the existence of the graves. During this visit, the AU told the USAID team that they were aware of the mass graves and that the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) had conducted an internal investigation.

¶11. The Acting AU Commander in Charge stated that AU staff do not hold meetings with the IDPs. The AU confirmed that they did not proceed with the firewood patrols that were requested by the IDPs and UNHCR, because the Commissioner for Mukjar locality, Hashim Abbas Ziad, refused to allow them to occur. Regarding DPA actions and planning for the DDDC, the AU Commander in Charge stated that the AU has not conducted

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any DPA related activities because they have not been trained on the document and do not feel prepared to speak on its contents. Instead of independently asking civil society members to participate, the AU asked the local government to identify DDDC participants. The IDP leaders are well aware that this is how the AU is proceeding on the DPA and it exacerbates their negatives views of both the AU and the DPA.

The Perspective of Local Governments

¶12. The USAID team made a courtesy call to Abdul Nasir, the Deputy Commissioner of Mukjar locality. He thanked the U.S. for all its assistance to the people of Darfur. Nasir stated that he needs assistance in discussing and explaining the DPA because it is a complex and lengthy legal document, and he has no financial resources to implement it. Regarding the DDDC, Nasir stated that he is waiting for more information from the Qpeace committeesQ that are established in the various states to deal with the DDDC. When the team visited the HAC in Garsila, they complained that they were not informed of USAIDQs programs and needed to arrange USAIDQs visit with IDPs. The HAC in Garsila were supportive of DPA activities but recognized that the NGOs cannot work on these issues due to a conflict of mandate.

The Compensation Issue

¶13. Members of Darfur civil society, heads of local NGOs, lawyers, and U.N. officials explain that the Fur are the majority of the displaced population. The Fur constitute the highest number of people who lost land, homes, fruit trees, livestock, relatives, livelihoods, and personal possessions. UNHCR-Intersos findings confirm that in Wadi Saleh/Mukjar area, the majority of villages destroyed were 80 to 100 percent Fur. Most Zaghawa have remained on their desert land, which is unlike the fertile, greener lands of Jebel Marra and Wadi Saleh. The Fur, rightly or wrongly, see that the Qleader of the ZaghawaQ did not fight for the needed compensation because the Zaghawa did not lose as much as the Fur did. The perception of such an imbalance between losses suffered may explain why the compensation issue is so important to the Fur.

Actions Needed to Implement the DPA

¶14. Merely distributing the DPA and hoping the IDPs will read it, be convinced by it, and change the minds of their leaders is not enough. The IDPs do not feel involved or connected to the DPA and its origins. What little steps the Sudanese government has taken on the DDDC have spoiled the DPAQs credibility within the Mukjar community already. Quick action by the U.N. and AU must be taken in the areas where Fur are the majority. Those opposing the DPA see the AU as Qunder the thumbQ of the Sudanese government. The AU must improve its public relations strategy with IDPs in order to proceed on DPA implementation. For the most part, IDPs in Mukjar and Garsila still see the U.N. as an unbiased international organization. The U.N., in coordination with the AU, should facilitate discussions and workshops for those who want to learn more about the DPA and DDDC.

STEINFELD